

COLOSSAL

A ROMANCE OF THE NORTH ATLANTIC BY RANDALL PARRISH



MANY items bearing upon these adventures which have lately befallen me have found publication in the newspapers or in magazines, distorted and untrue, and resulting in letters of inquiry from friends, induce me now to write out the tale while the incidents remain fresh in memory. Indeed, I owe the truth not only to myself but even more to her who so bravely shared with me those days and nights of peril. In doing this, which I now conceive to be a duty, I require no imagination, no knowledge of literary art, for all I need tell is the simple truth in plain, direct language, just as I might relate it to companions at the club. The story, unusual as it may appear to those whose lives have never been bounded by the commonplace, was natural enough under the circumstances, and the telling of it should be equally unartificial. I have nothing to conceal, and my one desire is to record the truth.

The earlier portion of my life was the sea, and when others of my age were grinding away through their courses in college, I was apprenticed to the merchant service in a fleet largely owned by my father, trading between New York and northern European ports. Loving the work, and possibly assisted by the fact that I was my father's son, I rose rapidly, until licensed as captain of steam, and assigned to command the *Yucca*, a freighter of 3000 tons. At thirty-seven, however, the novelty and fascination of a sea life ceased its attraction, and when my father died sufficient property became my share from the estate to enable my resigning this command, and retiring permanently from the service. Circumstances, unnecessary now to relate, caused me to make permanent home in Chicago, where I soon became engaged in business, finding my sole recreation in yachting upon the western lakes. My interest in this sport, and my ownership of a steam yacht of unusual power, greatly widened my circle of acquaintance. Such were the rather commonplace surroundings of my life, when, at thirty-seven, adventure suddenly called me out into the unknown.

Nothing could have been more unexpected than the occasion which took me to New York. Carrington—Gerald Carrington, the Copper King—had just placed his new steam yacht, the *Esmeralda*, in commission, and was eager to christen it by a run across to the ports of Spain. He wrote urging me to become one of the party. The temptation was irresistible, for, as I knew Mrs. Carrington was in Europe, the guests on board would undoubtedly all be men, and probably congenial fellows.

A bachelor myself, the long hours at sea had left me unaccustomed to the society of women, whose presence I avoided whenever possible. Hence, I accepted Carrington's invitation by merely agreeing to be a passenger, and packed a few things necessary for the trip, and unaccompanied by even a valet caught the Twentieth Century for New York. I arrived there July 28, 1914, registering at the Biltmore, with no thought of adventure in my mind, but only anticipations of a pleasant, uneventful outing amid men of my own class, and an opportunity to view a land which I had never before visited.

YACHT READY FOR SEA
Carrington lived on Long Island, and I talked with him on the phone. There were to be twelve in the party, the names of two, who were former associates of Carrington, mentioned in our brief conversation. The yacht was lying at Tompkinsville, provisioned, and ready for the sea. I must be on board by 3 o'clock the following day, and he gave me a quick explainer of instructions as to the best mode of reaching the vessel. The remainder of the day was passed in calling upon certain old acquaintances in the city, and the reading of special newspapers and editions, depicting the progress of the war in Europe, as I had no way likely to become involved, I merely perused these reports with languid interest.

An accident to the ferry caused me to miss the last train which I had anticipated taking the next morning, and I was consequently left to wait until the morning train to arrive at Tompkinsville. The others were already safely aboard when I hurried across the gangplank, to receive the cordial welcome of Carrington, who immediately ordered the vessel to start. The guests must have been gathered on the upper deck, enjoying the excitement of departure, for I caught no glimpse of anyone on board, excepting some members of the crew, as the steamer moved away, and the cabin assigned to me during the voyage. It was a sea parlor, evidently exclusively mine, as no other luggage was visible, containing a brass bed securely anchored to the deck, and every imaginable convenience. As I stood, gazing out through the open port at the Long Island shore slipping swiftly past, I could not but contrast the comfort and luxury of the present with my old quarters on the freighter. It was like a leap into fairyland.

The brief view I had obtained of the boat impressed me strongly, both with its beauty, and seagoing qualities. I was sailor enough to appreciate all this at a glance. The *Esmeralda* was quite evidently the last word in marine construction, built to play to a man's every sense meant little. I was aboard a steam yacht, schooner-rigged aloft, of over 1500 tons, constructed for deep-water cruising, well-manned, and able to combat the storms of any ocean. Within, the furnishings were rich and tasteful, with the manner in which she slipped through the waters evidenced the mighty power of the engines. Within my stateroom the vibrations of the screw were scarcely perceptible, yet already I must have been traveling seaward at fifteen knots.

collected from strange tribes throughout the seven seas. Forward, an open passage, guarded only by silently swinging doors, led to the steward's pantry, and various storerooms beyond, and this opening a broad, brass-railled stairway led easily to the upper deck. Sunlight touched the edge of the companionway and flickered down through a half-opened skylight above, yielding cheerfulness to the scene, yet inviting to the open air. I would meet those with whom I was destined to companion on this voyage across summer seas.

I paused in the shelter of the companion, feeling now more decidedly the movement of the vessel and realizing that we were encountering a strong head wind, with a fairly heavy sea. This but contributed to my enjoyment of the scene, and at first my whole attention was concentrated on the wide expanse of green water, white-capped and shimmering beneath the sun's rays. To the right extended the beautiful Long Island shore, so plainly visible I could perceive all the houses of a village, while on the other hand the broad expanse of the sound appeared deserted, except for a single distant sail showing white against the water.

Before me, the spotlessly clean deck of the *Esmeralda* extended almost to the butt of the foremast, the emergency boom strapped tightly out to the sea, and protected by tarpaulin, every rope's end carefully coiled, three white boats locked in the davits at either side, their canvas covers buttoned down firmly. The white paint shone in the sunshine and the brasswork glittered dazzlingly. The vessel was, indeed, a picture of rare beauty as she raced bravely forward, rising buoyantly to the waves, the wind singing through the taut rigging aloft. My eyes followed the white peak of the foremast, where a group of sailors, in uniforms of white duck, were gathered beside the windlass. Above them, his hand on the butt of the lowspirited, a solitary figure, the lookout, clearly out-lined against the blue of the sky as though chiseled from marble.

The deck, amidships, was clear, not even so much as a closed hatch disfiguring the level surface. Beyond was the bridge, with its rails of gleaming brass, and below, an open door facing aft, revealed the chart house.

I could see enough of its interior from where I stood to discern a table and several chairs, with the outlines of a map hanging against the further wall. My attention was attracted by the narrow bridge two officers, uniformly in dark-blue, with white caps, moved back and forth, or stood motionless, binoculars to their eyes.

MYSTERY EXPLAINED
No passengers, however, were visible, yet this mystery was soon explained as I stepped to one side and glanced aft. The cabin projection was not high, yet headwinds, and the flashing of a red and white beacon far away to the right gave me some knowledge of our position—off Eaton's Point. By dawn then we should be breasting the long swells of the broad Atlantic. The old love of the sea came back as I breathed in gratefully once more the salt air, and stared out over the black water. The rumbling of the screw, the trembling of the deck underfoot, the splash of waves alongside, were old, familiar, and indeed glad to be there; to dream of the long, delightful voyage ahead, and drink in once more the fascinating mystery of the sea.

I know not how long I stood there, smoking and dreaming of the past; once I crossed over to port, watching a great sound steamer glide silently past us, every opening a blaze of light, her decks crowded with people; and once we barely escaped collision with a little fishing smack, flying before the wind for some Long Island haven with not even a lantern strung at her masthead. I heard the sharp cry of the officer on our bridge, and leaned over to catch a glimpse of frightened faces peering upward at me, as the little craft went tearing past, and I turned into the black water. The incident gave me a thrill such as I had not experienced in years, and I could understand the injured feelings of the mate, as he leaned far out over the bridge rail, and cursed into the black night. Nothing else occurred, however, to break the monotony, and finally wearying of it all, I went below, being in no mind to join at games with the others. I met Carrington at the companion where we exchanged a few words, mine largely in excuse for retiring so early. Even as I rested on my bed, McCann's high-pitched voice reached me through the open port, with an occasional burst of laughter. Nevertheless I sleep asleep.



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CHAPTER II A Woman on Board

I BELIEVE I was among the first to leave the table and return outside, and as my inclination was to remain alone and enjoy the calm of the night, I ventured forth along the deserted deck, until I found fancied security from observation in the shadow of a small boat. The others, as they emerged later from the companion, outlined a moment against the light, turned once again aft and resumed their old places. I could hear the murmur of their voices and the clink of poker chips, but was content myself to lean above the railing and stare out across the dark waters. It was a still, starry night, with here and there a flickering distant light visible. The sea had gone down somewhat, and the wind was no longer strong.

Apparently we were considerably further off, and the flashing of a red and white beacon far away to the right gave me some knowledge of our position—off Eaton's Point. By dawn then we should be breasting the long swells of the broad Atlantic. The old love of the sea came back as I breathed in gratefully once more the salt air, and stared out over the black water. The rumbling of the screw, the trembling of the deck underfoot, the splash of waves alongside, were old, familiar, and indeed glad to be there; to dream of the long, delightful voyage ahead, and drink in once more the fascinating mystery of the sea.

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SHIP STOPS
Some dormant sense of seamanship, aroused to new life perhaps by my brief watch on deck, must have awakened me. For I sat straight up in bed, conscious that the vessel's motion had ceased. All was silent, no jar shook the keel, no footstep sounded on the deck above. I switched on the electric light, and glanced at my watch; it was slightly after midnight. Through the open port nothing was visible but the dark water and the far-off gleam of a light altering in flashes of white. I did not know enough of this coast line to identify the signal, yet it was plainly evident we were some distance from land. Why the *Esmeralda* had stopped her engines was no special concern of mine, and I lay down again. But sleep would not return. I tossed and turned, and finally arising in sheer desperation hastily donned my clothes. The after cabin was deserted, softly lighted by one shaded electric globe, beneath which the brass stair-rails shone dully. I emerged on to the deck, gratefully breathing in the fresh night air. At first I could perceive no signs of the watch on duty; not a moving figure was visible, and I crossed over to the port rail to obtain a better view forward. As I stood there, a man descended the ladder from the bridge, and the light of a searchlight

perfection, and the chief quite evidently a genius. We lingered over the wine and cigars, the conversation drifting where it would. McCann played and sang; several of the younger men joining him, and when we finally retired again to the deck night had settled quietly down over the waters.

and when he finally came out again, I crossed the deck so as to intercept him. "Anything going wrong, Mr. Seeley?" I asked. "You have stopped the engines." He stared at me through the dark, blinded still perhaps by the glare of the chart-room, and unable to recognize my strange voice. Yet he was a yachtsman, trained above all to courtesy.

"Nothing serious, sir," he announced, civilly enough. "The engines are new, and not well adjusted yet; a bit of shaft went wrong, and has to be repaired."

THE WOMAN APPEARS
"Not intimately, although I retain some memory of the charts. I saw merchants' service on the old *Atlas* Line." "A fine line that," he acknowledged readily. "I made my first voyage as cabin-boy, on the *Mohawk*. You are Mr. Hollis, I presume, sir. I overheard Mr. Carrington tell Captain Turner you were to be one of the party aboard. Well, good night, sir; I must make certain the watch is awake."

He touched his cap courteously and disappeared beneath the shadow of the bridge, leaving me again alone, undecided whether to return below or endeavor to walk off my sleepiness. I scarcely know what idle curiosity led me to stroll along the narrow deck space around the cabin to the louvering place at the stern. The rubber deck matting muffled my steps, while the light of the stars along the water surface reflected sufficient light to give me fair view beneath the awning, which had not been rolled up when the guests retired. I stopped suddenly in surprise, staring across at the opposite rail, questioning the evidence of my own eyes. There, clearly outlined in the star-glimmer, was plainly revealed the figure of a woman. Some instinct of fear, or perchance, a slight sound of approach, must have apprised her of my presence, for she turned instantly toward me, bending slightly forward, her face visible in the shadow; and then, before I could either move or speak, she fled along the port rail, vanishing immediately behind the protection of the cabin. I felt sure that her parted lips had uttered a quick exclamation, and her startled effort at escape was sufficient to urge me to pursue. Who could she be? Why was she here on board the *Esmeralda*? Above all, why should she be so eager to escape observation?

nor did I awaken until the steward announced the last breakfast call by a vigorous rapping on my door. The *Esmeralda* still swung motionless, and I could hear a faint tapping of hammers far below deck, the work of greasing on the recalcitrant machinery. Carrington was seated alone at the table when I entered the cabin, lingering over his coffee, and he remained to keep me company, seemingly in a genial mood in spite of the delay. "Don't hurry, Hollis," he said, as the waiter brought me grapefruit as a first course. "We have all the time in the world. I suppose you have observed we are lying at that moment to spring the important question. The stopping of the engine woke me last night and I went on deck to learn the cause. Once a sailor, always a sailor, you know. That was soon after midnight and Mr. Seeley said everything would be fixed right in a few hours."

"There was more damage done than Gault supposed. I had my doubts of the sound engine. However, we shall be off now in another hour—I was below myself before coming to breakfast."

"No job then your force cannot handle?" "Oh, no; Gault is a perfectly capable fellow, one of the crank shafts was wrongly adjusted; they are putting it back into place now."

He lit a cigar and leaned comfortably back in his chair, looking amiably across at me through the blue haze of smoke. "Rather nice bunch of fellows for a cruise, don't you think?" "Quite so, although I only knew two previously."

"Yes—Fosdick and McCann. The others are either bankers or brokers; fellows I meet every day or so in my business, you know. We cut each other's throats on the street, but sometimes it is worth our while to get together. You have never done much in stocks?" "I shook my head."

"My business education was in an entirely different school," I said quietly, ignoring his lead. "My father never speculated, but a good investor on that subject." Carrington chuckled, as though at a pleasant memory. "Your father was a fine man, Robert, a gentleman of the old school, but a bit puritanical in his notions. I never advocate speculation myself, but have never shown any qualms of conscience against betting on a sure thing. Perhaps we can

discuss this later—before our voyage ends." "This then is more of a business than a pleasure trip, sir?" He laughed, watching the smoke rings rise lazily in the air. "Well, hardly that, my boy. My hospitality is not to be so strictly limited. However, by business we shall discuss some matters of business importance before our return. We are all more or less interested in the state of the market. By the way, you have some idle money, I hear?" "Not a large sum at present, although it is true I control some capital."

Carrington pushed back his chair and arose to his feet. "That is of no immediate importance," he said carelessly. "But in my judgment we are not far away from a great opportunity in finance, when it will pay well to be on the inside. It may interest you to know that a copper pool is being organized."

"I suspected as much; you have some news?" "Exceedingly important news. Listen, Hollis, this is strictly confidential and worth your thinking it over. Only two men on board know the truth. There will be war in Europe—the biggest war ever known in history—within a month. I base my prediction on dispatches from confidential agents in Berlin, Paris, St. Petersburg and Vienna. They are in positions to know. Do you realize what that will mean for instance to copper?"

"I can imagine, sir. But if we are on the verge of such a sudden rise in the market value, why do you leave New York for a long voyage?" Carrington smiled, stroking his gray mustache. "A natural question, perhaps, coming from one not acquainted with my methods," he answered good humoredly. "Because I prefer to be thought out of it. Everybody on the Street is aware that I am at it. I see this escape being impounded for information. I am unsuspected of being where I can manipulate the market. I have with me, also, others, whose absence from New York will greatly tend to quiet suspicion."

"Yes, but that is certainly a handicap." "Not in the least; the *Esmeralda* is equipped with a powerful wireless outfit, and we have on board the most expert operator to be procured in New York. I shall be in direct communication with my office every hour of the day and night. Moreover, I have with me men who possess and who control millions, and who are smart, shrewd speculators. Tomorrow, once safely beyond Point Judith, I shall explain to them my plan; meanwhile, Hollis, think it over."

He turned toward the mainmast, and I watched him as he disappeared into the darkness. The girl on board, was it possible that she could have any connection with this affair? At least I would have Carrington knew or suspected her presence on board. "The way," I spoke with an assumption of carelessness, "is to get a full understanding, is at present in Europe?" "Yes, in Switzerland; I have called on that she had returned as far as London at once."

"You seem very confident as to the truth of your friend's statement. Carrington reported to me."

"I am; I know the men who have reported to me."

"I see; and consequently, there are no women on board?" "Women?" he made a swift, expressive gesture. "Certainly not. I wrote Carrington that effect, I believe, at least I so instructed my secretary. This voyage is primarily a business affair. Why should you ask that question, Hollis. You have met all my guests."

I hesitated, yet determined to put him fully to the test. If he knew, either his manner would betray him, irrespective of his words. "I imagined I saw a woman on the deck last night, when I ventured out to learn why the engine had stopped. No doubt it was an illusion."

"It surely must have been," his voice evidencing surprise. "For I give you my word there is not a woman on this yacht. I was on board twenty-four hours before we sailed, and kept my eyes open. What, in your mind, did the creature look like?" "Nothing at all definite, a mere outline in the gleam of the stars. The vision of her vanished before I could approach close enough to assure myself even of her reality. I searched the deck later, but found no trace. It may have been an odd combination of shadow, but at the time I felt convinced the vision was actually flesh and blood."

Carrington laughed heartily. "Dismiss it, my boy," he said, his hand gripping the brass rail. "We may indeed have ghost women on board, but no flesh and blood ones. Better join us on deck, and let the sun and wind clear your brain—perhaps the champagne caused the mischief!" "Hardly," I answered, adopting his mood. "As I did not touch any. However, I will join you presently."

I watched him disappear through the companion, stirring my coffee nonchalantly enough. Yet I could not help but wonder that I did not know, possessed no suspicion; nevertheless I remained convinced there was a woman on board the *Esmeralda*.

CHAPTER III I Meet the Mystery

THE repair job required longer than any one anticipated, as the captain was finally obliged to send a launch ashore to have some of the machinery replaced. Carrington accompanied the launch party, but the others of us remained on board, amusing ourselves as best we might through a rather hot and tiresome day. Carrington received several messages by wireless, but exhibited no disposition to reveal their contents to his guests, and the shore boat brought back to us the New York morning papers, although nothing definite in the way of war news had accrued previous to their going to press, the editorials afforded us ample material for discussion.

Before the evening meal had ended—the party still lingering in the cozy quarters below over their coffee and cigars—the yacht once again got under way, and steamed slowly eastward down the Sound. Evidently the officers were trying out the newly repaired machinery, with the result, as Carrington received several messages by wireless, but exhibited no disposition to reveal their contents to his guests, and the shore boat brought back to us the New York morning papers, although nothing definite in the way of war news had accrued previous to their going to press, the editorials afforded us ample material for discussion.

A GAME OF CARDS
I took a hand for an hour or more at a table devoted to Carrington's contest for below over their coffee and cigars—the yacht once again got under way, and steamed slowly eastward down the Sound. Evidently the officers were trying out the newly repaired machinery, with the result, as Carrington received several messages by wireless, but exhibited no disposition to reveal their contents to his guests, and the shore boat brought back to us the New York morning papers, although nothing definite in the way of war news had accrued previous to their going to press, the editorials afforded us ample material for discussion.

From mind the recollection of that woman whom I had seen in this very spot the night before. I had actually seen her—it was no vision, no dream. The reality only became more apparent as I reviewed all the circumstances of Carrington's contempt for a disabled had left not the slightest impression on my mind. No doubt he had had in what he said, and possessed no suspicion whatever of her presence on the yacht. But she was here nevertheless—why, how, and what purpose by whose plan? Carrington conjectured—but that she actually existed and was hidden somewhere aboard I had not the slightest doubt, and I must solve the mystery alone. No one else had seen her, no one else could recall a single individual in the company to whom I could repeat my suspicion. They would take Carrington had attempted to do. Yet I had unconsciously satisfied in my own mind and had not been mistaken.

But how could I prove the vision? How establish, at least to my own satisfaction, her identity and purpose? I thought it all over again and again. If Carrington was unaware of her presence, I could read no longer felt any doubt—but she must have slipped aboard unseen, or perchance, aided and abetted by one of the crew. Somewhere below, where discovery was not probable except through discovery, she was kept in hiding. There must be a vacant stateroom forward—petty quarters—in which she might remain concealed. Yet to accomplish this she would need assistance. She must have had in getting aboard unseen, some knowledge of a vacant cabin and who might supply her with food. Only an officer could do this without arousing suspicion. Except for the engineer, Gault, whom I had not seen, but who was hardly in a position to render such service, there were no other who might be accomplished—the Turner, and the first and second mates, Hatch and Seeley. I dismissed all of the first two almost instantly, as they were an old sea-dog, a former mate of an unapproachable and an extremely disciplined individual, while Hatch was a slow-spoken individual, never giving the slightest civility to any one, and my eyes these would never see anything under any conceivable circumstances.

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